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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

Seminar on the Policy Maker and the Intelligence Analyst

The Center's Analytic Seminar Group convened on February 27 for a discussion with Dr. Laurence Lynn of Harvard University. This session of the Seminar Series was designed to explore the consumer's view of the intelligence producer-policy maker relationship, focusing especially on such questions as whether policy makers are interested primarily in the accuracy of bottom line intelligence judgments or in the thoroughness, precision, and applicability of intelligence analysis itself. Dr. Lynn has practical as well as academic experience in this area, having been a consumer of intelligence while on the NSC staff. A summary of his remarks and of the ensuing discussion follows.

Dr. Lynn served on the NSC staff during the formative period of the first SALT agreement. He recalled that policy makers found it difficult to determine whether intelligence community differences on SALT matters were real, or merely reflections of parochial interests. He noted that policy makers felt uncomfortable when confronted with these differences. They did not like having to choose between conflicting sets of judgments;

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they could not, for example, simply dismiss the military's position as lacking in objectivity. Policy makers sought to uncover and understand the analysis that lay behind the intelligence judgments and dissents. They wanted a succinct, accurate, and precise explanation--in terms a layman could understand--of the issues involved and of the areas of agreement and disagreement. They eventually got it from the so-called MIRV panel, the precursor of the SALT verification panel. But policy makers found that their efforts disturbed intelligence producers, who seemed to resent having their judgments questioned by "non-experts." Intelligence producers seemed to feel that policy makers were attacking their professionalism, competence, and ability to render intelligence judgments.

Dr. Lynn declared that it is unreasonable to expect the intelligence community to have enough information on certain complex issues so that its judgments can be accepted at face value as valid and not open to question. Intelligence producers would be the "wisest" people in the government if this were true. This is especially the case when policy makers are not fully sharing information they have on the subject. Thus, policy makers are often less interested in the judgments of an analytic product than with whether the product is

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helpful in identifying ways of thinking about the problem, pointing out implications, and displaying uncertainties.

Dr. Lynn noted that policy makers tend to see CIA information as more objective than that of agencies or organizations with special interest constituencies. The Agency is in the unique position of being dedicated solely to the interests of the President and the NSC. Policy makers, according to Dr. Lynn, presume that the CIA can be counted on for professional and objective answers. Thus, the Agency has a headstart over other intelligence outfits, and when performance meets expectations the groundwork has been laid for truly productive intelligence producer-policy maker relationships. Policy makers will continue to return to a source of information that seems honest and makes sense. (In this connection it might be noted that a question was later raised as to whether CIA people have developed "countervailing biases" on certain issues, e.g., a tendency to automatically disagree with any judgments made by a military intelligence component.)

Dr. Lynn also declared, however, that CIA people have to realize that policy makers will never be as forthcoming with information on their own plans and activities as intelligence producers would like.

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Intelligence producers have to reconcile themselves to dealing with what information is available and coping with a lot of frustration.

In answering a question from a member of the Seminar Group, Dr. Lynn expanded on the importance of uncertainties. He declared that the nature of uncertainties and their implications for policy making are a key part of the analytic process. To simply say, for example, that the US can verify Soviet compliance with arms control agreements may be the best intelligence judgment, but it is a judgment based on certain assumptions and complicated by numerous uncertainties that should be laid out for policy makers. Dr. Lynn again noted that policy makers do not like being put into the position of having to decide which of differing sets of judgments to accept. They do not always want to be their own analysts, but they do want to be given some basis upon which to evaluate complex judgments.

It was noted that consumers today sometimes do want strong, final "bottom line" judgments from intelligence producers. Dr. Lynn agreed, and declared that there should be a variety of available response styles. These should be geared to differing consumer preferences. Policy makers sometimes fail to grasp the uncertainties

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involved in an issue or situation. They believe there is "an answer" that intelligence can and should give them.

The discussion then turned to the problem of policy makers' failure to make clear the kinds of questions they want answered. Dr. Lynn observed that policy makers often do not know how to ask questions: intelligence producers have to attempt to determine consumer needs for themselves. Dr. Lynn noted that as a consumer he found it difficult to state what he needed from intelligence or to tell intelligence producers what his agenda was. He much preferred that an intelligence producer seek his reaction to a proposed project or suggest what intelligence might be able to do for him.

In a discussion concerning the demise of the Office of National Estimates, Dr. Lynn said he believed that a loss of confidence in the estimative process--rather than in the people involved in the process--was responsible. This loss of confidence probably was related to the fact that estimates tended to be "waffle documents" that consumers considered to be not particularly helpful. Dr. Lynn noted that the community coordination process probably was to blame. It was noted that the estimates produced under the NIO system are supposed to avoid footnotes that do nothing more than state disagreement with the community judgment.

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Finally, Dr. Lynn agreed with an observation on the crucial nature of his own participation in the arms control papers mentioned earlier in the discussion. This exposure, he said, not only helped in the production of a more useful product, it gave him an understanding of the dynamics of the production process. This is, of course, not always possible in intelligence producer-consumer relationships, but it does suggest the value, where possible, of getting consumers and producers together in panels, boards, committees, etc. where clearer understanding and appreciation of the role and use of intelligence to policy makers is possible.

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